

Home Safety Tips for the Elderly

Slips and falls represent the primary source of injury for older people. Falls are the number one cause of injury-related death for males age 80 and older and for females age 75 and older.

According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), fall-related medical expenses cost Americans more than \$30 billion each year. The CDC estimates that these expenses are projected to increase to more than \$67 billion over the next 20 years. One-third of senior citizens aged 65 or older — or nearly 12 million people — experience falls each year, and almost 5,000 die from falls in the home.

The Home Safety Council study finds that while falls are the leading cause of home injury-related death among older adults, measures that can prevent critical falls are missing from many homes. Many caregivers of older adults cite a lack of knowledge and understanding of what actions to take in making the home safer in order to help prevent older adults from falling.

The Home Safety Council suggests that all caregivers conduct a home safety walk-through to identify and fix potential hazards. Below is a list of home safety tips that should be considered when conducting a home-safety walk-through:

- All stairs and steps should be protected with a secure banister or hand-rail on each side that extends the full length of the stairs. Porches, balconies and terraces should be properly protected.
- Hallways, stairwells and porches should be well lit. Stairwells should have a bright light at the top and bottom. Light switches should also be located at the top and bottom of the stairs and at both ends of long hallways.
- Nightlights should be used to help light hallways, bathrooms and stairwells. Keep a lamp or flashlight within reach of the bed.
- Stairs, steps and all passageways should be free of clutter. Telephone and electrical cords should be kept out of walkways. Furniture should be arranged so there is plenty of room to walk freely.
- The bathtub or shower should have a nonslip mat or strips on the standing area. Grab bars should be installed around the shower, bathtub and toilet. These grab bars should be sturdy enough to support a person's body weight.
- Set the thermostat of the water heater at 120° F or lower to prevent accidental scalding.

- All floors should be kept clean and dry. Promptly clean up grease, water or other spills.
- Throw rugs and loose carpet should be removed or secured firmly to the floor.
- A stepladder should be used to reach items on high shelves. A good stepladder has wide treads and easy-to-grab supports.
- Telephones should be located in each room and emergency numbers posted by each one.
- Door, drawer and cabinet knobs should be big, easy-to-grab C-shaped or D-shaped handles. These handles are especially helpful for someone with arthritis.
- Use lamps that can handle 100-200 watt light bulbs. An 85-year-old needs about three times the amount of light a 15-year-old needs to see the same thing.

You should also suggest the older adult consider subscribing to a medical alert or buddy system. Having an easy-to-reach, easy-to-activate tool gives both the older adult and caregiver greater confidence and security.

This article was written by/for Wells Fargo Advisors and provided courtesy of David M. Gustin, AAMS®, Vice President-Investments in Melville, N.Y. at 631-753-4533

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